



UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

*Development and environment in the
Wider Caribbean Region:
A Synthesis*

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PREFACE

It is now almost ten years since the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm, 5-16 June 1972) adopted the Action Plan for the Human Environment, including the General Principles for Assessment and Control of Marine Pollution. In the light of the results of the Stockholm Conference, the United Nations General Assembly decided to establish the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to "serve as a focal point for environmental action and co-ordination within the United Nations system" (General Assembly resolution (XXVII) of 15 December 1972). The organizations of the United Nations system were invited "to adopt the measures that may be required to undertake concerted and co-ordinated programmes with regard to international environmental problems", and the "intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations that have an interest in the field of the environment" were also invited "to lend their full support and collaboration to the United Nations with a view to achieving the largest possible degree of co-operation and co-ordination". Subsequently, the Governing Council of UNEP chose "Oceans" as one of the priority areas in which it would focus efforts to fulfil its catalytic and co-ordinating role.

The Regional Seas Programme was initiated by UNEP in 1974. Since then the Governing Council of UNEP has repeatedly endorsed a regional approach to the control of marine pollution and the management of marine and coastal resources and has requested the development of regional action plans.

The Regional Seas Programme at present includes ten regions* and has over 120 coastal States participating in it. It is conceived as an action-oriented programme having concern not only for the consequences but also for the causes of environmental degradation and encompassing a comprehensive approach to combating environmental problems through the management of marine and coastal areas. Each regional action plan is formulated according to the needs of the region as perceived by the Governments concerned. It is designed to link assessment of the quality of the marine environment and the causes of its deterioration with activities for the management and development of the marine and coastal environment. The action plans promote the parallel development of regional legal agreements and of action-oriented programme activities.

By decision 8(II) of 29 March 1974, the Governing Council of UNEP decided that priority should be given, in the fields of oceans, to regional activities and stressed the importance of the Caribbean region.

After a preparatory process, which included a number of expert meetings, missions and preparation of sectorial studies on resources and environmental problems of the Caribbean region, the Intergovernmental Meeting on the Action Plan for the Caribbean Environment Programme (Montego Bay, Jamaica, 6 - 8 April 1981), attended by representatives of Governments from 22 States of the region, adopted the

* Mediterranean, Kuwait Action Plan Region, West and Central Africa, Wider Caribbean, East Asian Seas, South-East Pacific, South-West Pacific, Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, East Africa and South-West Atlantic.

(ii)

Action Plan for the Caribbean Environment Programme and three resolutions dealing with (a) programme implementation, (b) institutional arrangements, and (c) financial arrangements related to the implementation of the Action Plan (UNEP/CEPAL/IG.27/3).

The present document (issued as UNEP/CEPAL/WG.48/Inf.4) served as one of the documents prepared to facilitate the negotiations which led to the adoption of the Action Plan.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In accordance with resolution 2997 (XXVII) of the General Assembly, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was established "as a focal point for environmental action and co-ordination within the United Nations system". The Governing Council of UNEP defined this environmental action as encompassing a comprehensive, transectoral approach to environmental problems which should deal not only with the consequences but also with the causes of environmental degradation.

Although environmental problems are global in scope, a regional approach to solving them seemed more realistic. By adopting a regional approach, UNEP felt it could focus on specific problems of high priority to the States of a given region thereby more readily responding to the needs of the Governments and helping to mobilize more fully their own national resources. It was thought that undertaking activities of common interest to coastal States on a regional basis should, in due time, provide the basis for dealing effectively with broader environmental problems.

UNEP's regional approach is at present being applied to eight regional seas where action plans are operative or are under development: The Mediterranean (adopted in 1975), the Red Sea (adopted in 1976), the Kuwait Action Plan Region (adopted in 1978), the West African Region (under development, adoption expected in 1980), the East Asian Seas (under development, adoption expected in 1980), the South-East Pacific (under development, adoption expected in 1980), the South-West Pacific (under development, adoption expected in 1981) and the Wider Caribbean**. Unless stated otherwise, the Wider Caribbean Region is defined as comprising the States and Territories of the insular Caribbean including the Bahamas, the north-eastern parts of South America from Colombia to French Guiana, Panama, the States of Central America, Mexico, the Gulf States of the United States, as well as the coastal and open waters of the Caribbean Sea proper, the Gulf of Mexico, and the waters of the Atlantic Ocean adjacent to the States and Territories mentioned above (figure 1).

Two elements are fundamental to UNEP's regional programme:

- (a) Co-operation with the Governments of the regions. Since any specific regional programme is aimed at benefiting the States of that region, Governments are encouraged to participate from the very beginning in the formulation and acceptance of the programme. After acceptance, the implementation of the adopted programme is carried out by national institutions which have been nominated by their Governments.
- (b) Co-ordination of the technical work through the United Nations system. Although the regional programmes are implemented predominantly by Government-nominated institutions, a large number of the United Nations specialized organizations are called upon to provide assistance to these

** Since the document was prepared, action plans have been adopted for West and Central Africa (1981), the East Asian Seas (1981), the South-East Pacific (1981), the Wider Caribbean (1981) and the South-West Pacific (1982).

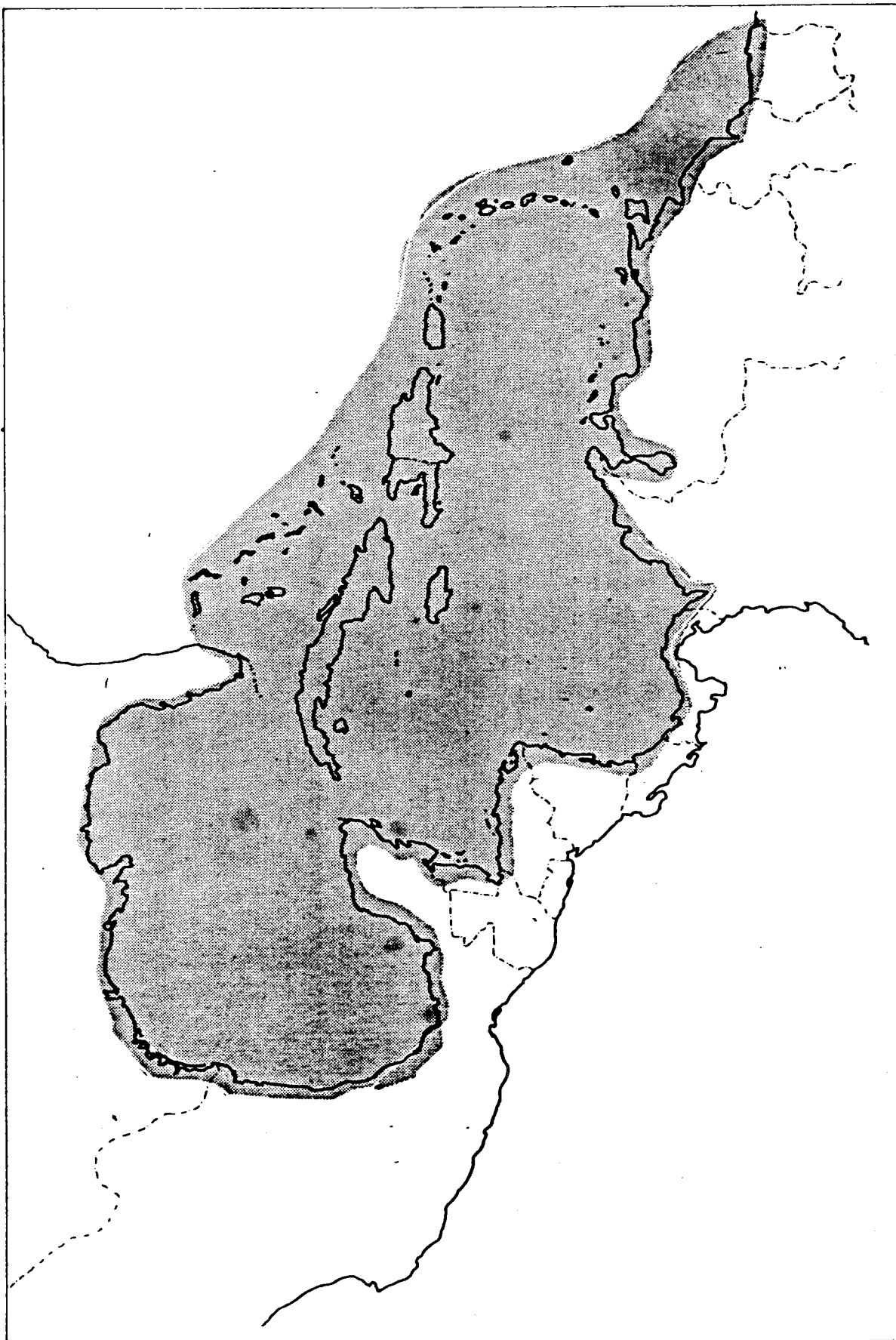


Figure 1 : The "Wider Caribbean Region", as defined in this document

national institutions. UNEP acts as an overall co-ordinator although in some cases this role is limited to the initial phase of the activities. Thus the support and experience of the whole United Nations system contributes to the programme.

The components of a regional programme are outlined in an "Action Plan" which is formally adopted by the Governments before the programme enters an operational phase.

Each action plan consists of three standard components as adopted by the United Nations Conference on Human Environment (Stockholm, 5 - 18 June 1972) and endorsed by subsequent meetings of UNEP's Governing Council. They are:

- (i) Environmental assessment. The assessment and evaluation of the causes, magnitude and consequences of environmental problems are essential activities providing the basis for assistance to national policy-makers to manage their natural resources in an effective and sustainable manner.
- (ii) Environmental management. A wider range of activities requiring regional co-operation falls under this component: rational exploitation of living resources, utilization of renewable sources of energy, management of freshwater resources, disaster preparedness and co-operation in cases of emergency, etc. Regional conventions, elaborated by specific technical protocols, usually provide the legal framework for the action plan and have in many regions proved to be an excellent tool in the hands of environmental managers.
- (iii) Supporting measures. The national institutions are the institutional basis for the implementation of the action plan. Large-scale technical assistance and training are provided to them where necessary to allow their full participation in the programme. Existing global or regional co-ordinating mechanisms are used when appropriate. However, specific regional mechanisms may be created if Governments feel they are necessary. Public awareness of environmental problems is stimulated as an essential supporting measure for the action plan. Financial support is initially provided by UNEP and other international and regional organizations, but, as the programme develops, it is expected that the Governments of the Region assume increasing financial responsibility.

In accordance with the regional approach, an early association was sought by UNEP with the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) and a joint UNEP/ECLA project team was established to co-ordinate, under the overall guidance of UNEP and ECLA, the preparations for the development of an Action Plan for the Caribbean Environment Programme.

This document has been prepared by UNEP's Regional Seas Programme Activity Centre and the UNEP/ECLA project team, taking into account the comments and suggestions of an ad hoc group of experts and the meeting of the Advisory Panel on the Caribbean Environment Programme (Mexico City, 10 - 12 September 1979), as one of the basic background documents for the Meeting of Government-Nominated Experts (January 1980) which is being called to review the draft Action Plan for the Caribbean Environment Programme.

The document has been based on the nine sectoral overviews (1 - 9), prepared to highlight the economic, social, and environmental problems of the Wider Caribbean Region, as well as additional background information, reports, publications and communications available to the authors.

The document has three sections. The first briefly describes the scope and purpose of the document. The second examines some key issues relating to development and the environment in the Wider Caribbean. The third presents a suggested strategy for an action plan outlining the overall goals and objectives, the elements of the suggested substantive activities and the supporting measures necessary for the harmonious implementation of the action plan.

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